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This is a near-verbatim transcript [cleaned up a few ums, aws, and unnecessary repetitions] of the three part [audio interview](#) I conducted with the two iboga ceremony leaders from Britain. As well as the introduction to the audio interviews, you might want to read my article, also at this site, Iboga: [The Holy Wood Which Cares for Us](#). That article provides a good summary of the overall context of the iboga medicine that may help provide some background before you dive into the interview itself. As with the audio version, I've noted where each of the three parts begins and ends. As always, your [comments](#) and questions are invited.

## **Iboga Interview—in three parts:**

### **Part One**

Hello. My name is Stephen Gray and I'm sitting in my home this afternoon with two iboga ceremony leaders who have been doing this kind of work for quite a long time. I'm going to ask them to introduce themselves. First I'm going to call on Steve. Steve, if you would please say a little about your background and how you got to what you're doing now.

**Steve:** Sure, I'm in my late fifties. My initial initiation was into meditation practice in the late 70s. That was my introduction to experiences outside of the normal worldly experiences. Previous to that I had also had some experience with psychedelics, but the very profound experiences I had with meditation took me to places far beyond where the LSD had taken me.

So I had that practice, then more than twenty years ago I started to work with ceremony with a number of different teachers. I went to Mexico and did a variety of ceremonies, including with psilocybin mushrooms. After that I was working mainly in Europe. My partner that I live with is a teacher of ceremonial medicine, that is, ceremony as medicine.

Then sometime in the last ten years I came across ayahuasca. I've probably done a couple of hundred ayahuasca ceremonies by now. About five or six years ago I met a group of French people through my friend Sean here who were working with iboga and had very strong connections with a shaman in Gabon. I worked as a helper in those ceremonies for a while.

Meanwhile, I was already running ayahuasca ceremonies in Europe with Sean. When the French people stopped doing ceremonies we looked at working with the iboga and thought, well, we have a lot of respect for it so we'll just wait and see on this one. Very quickly we were joined by a French man who, as with Sean, had been out to Gabon and done an initiation. The three of us then started an iboga practice together. Now it's just Sean and myself. We also have two or three people who will assist us when we're working in various countries in Europe. And now we've been invited to Canada I'm very pleased to say.

**Stephen:** Thank you. And Sean, a brief explanation of how you got to what you're doing now?

**Sean:** I'm not sure if there's any brief explanation about this experience. It seems to be a life of many lives so far. So yes, I'm Sean. I was brought up as a Jehovah's Witness as a child.

**Stephen:** I'm sorry to hear that. [laughter].

**Sean:** One of the teachings I was brought up with was that when I die the soul returns to dust with the body and that death is like an eternal sleep. So I figured, well, I enjoy sleeping so I'm going to go out there and do everything you've told me I shouldn't do. I then spent about ten years trying to find myself through the extremes, through pushing myself to the extremes. Then at some point I smoked some DMT and had a realization that I had been basing my life on a belief system which was a lie, and that there was something far vaster than I had been led to believe. I had always had a strong calling before that, even whilst I was a Jehovah's Witness, that I never really fit into that doctrine. I always sensed that my master was within me and that I was responding to that inner voice. So when I had the DMT experience it very much confirmed that sense.

My calling then started in earnest. I had already been working with substances, but more misguided. I'd been associating with a drug dealer and feeling a strong call from the plants but not quite understanding how to facilitate my practice. Around that time I felt a very strong calling to work with ayahuasca and so I began to look for a practitioner working with ayahuasca that suited me. In the meantime I did a session with Salvia divinorum, the sage, and had a very intense experience with it. That was probably about twelve years ago. When I went to bed that night I had a dream that I was in the jungle. Some men took me to a clearing where a huge man was sitting. And he said to me, "Sean, when you do the ayahuasca, make sure you do it in a ceremonial setting."

In the morning it was very clear to me. I began to look online to see who is working with ayahuasca in ceremony. I found the UDV and the Santo Daime, but the only group I could make contact with was the Santo Daime. A friend of mine tracked somebody down who was one of the organizers for a Santo Daime group in London, so I called him up and invited myself along.

I then went there and had an absolutely amazing session. When I went up to the altar afterward there was a photo of a huge black man, and it was the man I had seen in my dream. His name was Mestre Irineu, the founder of Santo Daime in Brazil.

All the pieces of the puzzle were now falling into place. I worked with the Santo Daime group for about five years. At the time we were a small group, fifteen to twenty-five. For the first three and half years I met with them regularly, every couple of weeks, drinking for two days at a time. But then the group began to expand and after I'd been with them for about five years I had an opportunity with Gaston, a teacher and friend who came back from France one day and told me he'd just had an amazing experience with this wood, with iboga. He told me he had bumped into someone he hadn't seen in a long time. This guy had previously had some major issues he hadn't been able to let go of. But now his face was completely transformed. Gaston asked this fellow what had happened to bring about such a transformation. He said he had done an iboga cure at the very place Gaston was about to lead a workshop. Struck by the synchronicity, Gaston went and did an iboga ceremony, now he was encouraging me to do the same.

So I jumped right in without really looking into it. The synchronicity of it was that I had just done a three month cleanse. On the last day of my cleanse I went to France and met all these French people, none of whom spoke English. Since I didn't speak any French I couldn't understand their attempts to explain things to me. So all I could do was relax into it and experience it through my heart, without my mind being able to come into it.

So I had this experience of meeting the wood and it was so happy to meet me. It was like, "Oh Shaun, it's fantastic that you've come." It was very happy that I'd been working with ayahuasca. It showed me something. It said, "Look, your head's completely open to the astral, but you've got no connection to the earth. I'm making a tree with roots deep into the earth, your branches open to the heavens, and a clear channel for universal consciousness." And this has been my experience.

So I had an absolutely awe-inspiring session with the wood that weekend. When I stepped away from it I realized it was such an amazing medicine, and so compatible with what I'd been receiving within the ayahuasca, that to be stepping into the wood now was grounding my practice into the physical and enabling me to realize that what I knew was within me was also all around me.

So I got speaking to the doctor who was running it and we arranged that I would start bringing people over from the ayahuasca community in the U.K. to do iboga sessions in France. For about a year and a half I took two groups of people over every month, sometimes up to ten people, taking them through all their preparation beforehand, then being there for the journey and the aftercare. Most of the people were very mature in their process, having been working with the ayahuasca, and then stepping into the wood.

After that I started bringing people over to the U.K. We had the French crew coming over too. We ran really big sessions with up to eleven people coming for the cure, up to twenty-five assisting, and sometimes up to twelve people sitting behind the altar.

It was about then that Steve and I began to work together within the wood. Steve was running the kitchen. I guess we were running the floor space. Whilst the French crew were doing the ceremonial bit we were dealing with the casualties [laughter].

**Stephen:** Maybe this is a good opportunity for me to ask you to describe how you do these ceremonies.

**Steve:** It's a really clear design, if you like, for the ceremony. There's a death and a rebirth. It's three days and two nights. The first night is the death. During the middle day people are very much in the bardos. On the evening of that second day is when we need to start bringing people back, because if we don't bring them back they can be gone for a long time. And sometimes it's really difficult for people to find their way back. I've met people who have worked with this medicine on their own, not understanding how strong it was and how long the journey was. One guy told me, and this was a grounded guy, somebody who'd had a regular meditation practice for something like thirty years, but it took him two months to feel like he was back in his body. So it's a serious business running an iboga ceremony.

So on that second night is when we bring people back, and we bring them back through dance.

**Stephen:** That's similar to the way it's done in West Africa isn't it?

**Steve:** It is very similar, the components are very similar. It just makes sense. People leave their bodies basically, they're working somewhere else. If you read the descriptions of the bardo, then this is the kind of place people are in for the whole of that second day.

**Stephen:** So just for clarification, they eat the medicine on the evening of the first day, and then throughout that first night and the next day they're in the full grip of the medicine?

**Steve:** That's right. They're dead basically. Often the room is completely silent for hours.

**Stephen:** When you say they're gone, if I were to interview people coming out of one of these ceremonies, would they say that they had an out of body experience? Would they say that they were truly gone into another realm and not in their bodies?

**Steve:** You'll find, as with any other medicine, everybody has their own experience. But in general, yes, it's the longest day of your life when you do that.

**Sean:** But still in a body, because the moment they open their eyes they're conscious they're in a body. And the thing with it is that they're having their body restructured according to their intent, which is a really deep operation that takes place.

**Stephen:** Do they have to be conscious of their intention coming in and do you do intention sharing sessions?

**Steve:** Yeah. What we do is we make sure everybody has a full consultation, first of all to find out if it's okay for these people to actually come into a ceremony. Some people won't be even suitable to come and work with us. We may speak with someone on the phone ahead of time for an hour or so to really get through to, why, how have you been pulled in toward this experience. We really want to get to know them.

**Stephen:** How often would you actually have to turn someone away based on that initial consultation?

**Sean:** What tends to happen is that when we do the consultation it's the recognition that what's happening within that consultation is that the presence of the wood is stepping into them. The presence starts to speak to them through their reality. The consultation is a reading as well. We basically introduce them to the wood through the consultation. It often happens for psychic people. While we're having the conversation they'll say, "There's this extremely large black man who's just walked into my living room. He's sitting here with me. Has he got anything to do with you?"

**Stephen:** So by the time they're done with this phone consultation they've pretty much answered their own question as to whether or not they're ready for this work?

**Sean:** Well, kind of. The thing is it's about self-enquiry. So, who are you and why do you feel called to do this work.

**Stephen:** My experience with ayahuasca ceremonies is that it's difficult for a lot of us to really identify what our true intention is. We come in with a bunch of different needs. Do you find that challenging to bring people to where they're really clear about what their intention is?

**Steve:** That's why it's important to have the conversation some weeks before the ceremony ideally, though it's not always the case that it's needed. But sometimes it is because as soon as they begin the consultation that's the step. It's like they've said, "Yes, I want to do this." And that's when the iboga becomes present for them. They will begin to have things come to the surface and it will be quite challenging for some people. But usually between that time and the actual ceremony—and usually, in fact almost always now, they get another short consultation just before the ceremony where we're just trying to clarify things for them. But my own experience was that I had all these different aspects of my life which I knew I wanted to change. But I also understood, they were like branches of a tree and there was one main root. So by the time they come to the ceremony people are pretty clear about what the root is. From that point on, once they have spoken their intent and they're clear about it, it's just, relax. Relax and allow the plant to come in and do the work that needs to be done. You don't have to do anything. You can just lie back and allow the plant to do its work, and know that it's under the direction of your higher self.

**Stephen:** Does it tend to come on slowly? For example, ayahuasca can sometimes come on like a freight train and just bowl you over. It can be very difficult for people to ride with that at the beginning and that's where the shaman's songs and intervention can come in to help people through that period.

**Steve:** Sure, but iboga is very different from the ayahuasca though, it's a very different experience. There isn't much wiggle room with the iboga. Once you're in there, you're on the fast train. And there's no getting off [laughs].

**Sean:** I think just to mention as well that with the consultation, my experience of the bwiti, which is the energy that we're working with . . .

**Stephen:** The bwiti, by the way, most people probably don't know, is the name of the religion practiced by perhaps two to three million people in Gabon and surrounding areas. Is that correct?

**Sean:** Yes. My own personal experience of the bwiti is that I experience my essence as emptiness and my life practice and my ceremonial practice is one of nothingness. I'm letting go into nothingness and as I'm letting go into nothingness I'm letting go of everything. All the aspects that arise I'm letting go of. And when that happens there's a pure intelligence which is emanating from nothingness. And then this pure intelligence is able to potentiate through me. My experience is that bwiti and this pure intelligence is the same expression.

So when I'm working with iboga, I experience that iboga is the channel that grounds me into bwiti. When people come and have a consultation it's this relationship with the bwiti that they're coming into. The bwiti starts to speak to them through their reality, and it brings to the surface all those aspects where they're not grounded, all those parts of their lives that they don't take responsibility for. It brings all that up to the surface so we get to see the leaves and we get to see the shoot of the weed.

This all happens once they've had their consultation and they've stepped back into their reality, but still during that time before they come to the ceremony. So again, all the aspects that keep them in their experience of separation come up to the surface. All the suffering comes up to the surface, all the fear comes up to the surface. Maybe they're not so experienced with the spiritual journey. Then we'll get them to record it, to write it down. Then once you've got it all down you begin to see that underneath all the suffering is a root. And it's that root that we're looking for.

So then by the time people come in for the session they already know the expression of the wood. They know how this presence is speaking to them. They know what it is that they're letting go of, and they know what it is that they're letting go into.

**Stephen:** Fascinating. This is the end of Part One. We'll continue with the second part.

## Part Two

**Stephen:** Hello again. We were talking about the ceremonies. I'm going to start this session by asking Steve about how the medicine is actually prepared and taken.

**Steve:** We use the medicine in a form that's ground up. It's kind of like sawdust. It's literally the bark of the root. It's just a layer of the root of the plant. We usually receive bigger chunks of this root bark and put it through a kind of coffee grinder. It's just easier to work with in that state.

We step people into the experience gradually. They'll have a spoonful of the bark every hour during the first night until they've reached what is very obviously their personal dose. That might be two doses or it might be twelve doses. We usually get people to wet their mouths first. Then they just take the spoonful into their mouths, swallow it, wash it down with some water. There's no problem with water with iboga.

**Stephen:** Do people fast before ceremonies and if so, for how long?

Steve: Yeah, We give them a plan, like the week before. We ask them to watch what they're eating, especially stimulants. We ask them not to take anything which is going to alter their state of mind. That includes alcohol of course, probably alcohol more than anything else. [laughs]

**Sean:** What tends to happen beforehand is that people's resistance is coming up. So quite often before they come in and do the wood, the part of them that tries to escape into another experience will come up in intensity. So sometimes people with addictions, like smoking weed, the pull will be strong in the days leading up to the ceremony. We say to people, in the week leading into it, look, you're sweeping out the temple. At the same time, when these aspects that they're struggling with come up to the surface, we ask them to be conscious of them.

**Stephen:** Ayahuasca is said to react with particular foods. For example, you may be asked to avoid pork, sugar, alcohol, salt etc. for some days before a ceremony. That's not so with iboga?

**Steve:** No, and you know, even with the ayahuasca, we've done hundreds of ceremonies. Some of these rules and laws are to do with a particular path or a particular person's practice with the plant. So you should follow those guidelines if you're working with that person or on that path. But some of these rules and laws you hear about aren't hard and fast.

I know a very good story of someone who went off and had a beautiful lunch and a couple of glasses of wine. When he got back to the house his friend said, "Are you ready for the ayahuasca work, we're going now?" And he responded, "What, today?" But then he had absolutely no ill effects whatsoever. It's just one story but there are lots like it.

**Stephen:** So coming back to the iboga ceremony, you start on the evening of the first day and give people a spoonful of medicine every hour until they reach the appropriate place for them. What happens from there?

**Sean:** I usually give the wood out. We do it step by step. We do one dose, and then a half hour later another dose, and then one every hour. But what often happens for people beforehand is that when we do the pre-consultation, we have a chat with everybody individually just before the session to see what's happened for them, what they're

asking for, and what are their sensitivities. Often people say, “When I drink ayahuasca I have to drink a lot. I’ve been drinking for ages and I look around and see others getting sick but I’m not getting sick. So give me a lot of wood and I’ll be able to hold it down.” Then there are those with physical sensitivities. You kind of know you need a sensitive approach with them. Okay, small doses and we’ll see where you go. But when we step into the session the wood takes over. Quite often the people who think they need to eat a lot will start throwing up after two or three spoons, while the people who are supposed to be very sensitive and not able to eat a lot will end up eating more than everybody else. So we’re just taking them to their reset point.

**Stephen:** Is throwing up with iboga similar to the way ayahuasca functions as a purgative, expelling mental and physical toxins?

**Sean:** The approach is that they’re coming here to let go of their suffering. They’re expressing their intent and the plant is then using their intent to restructure their DNA accordingly. So what’s happening on the first night is that the plant is taking them to the root of their suffering, whenever the suffering happened, whenever it was that they lost their innocent fascination with what is and began to identify with what the mind is saying.

**Stephen:** In your experience, is that often one traumatic event, or is it an accumulation of a series of events that happened when they were quite young?

**Steve:** It can be any combination.

**Sean:** It’s getting right back down to the original event. On a core level you have a recognition of what your consciousness was at the time, the consciousness of the beings who are with you, and how this event permeates through all the layers of consciousness informing your reality now. And when you have a recognition of the core level—we’re not talking about a conscious level—the plant pulls the root out. When the root comes out, everything comes out, and then it’s possible to have quite an explosive purge.

**Steve:** And often more explosive than you get with ayahuasca.

**Stephen:** I’ve read descriptions from several people of experiencing it as if a movie screen has been pulled down in front of you and you actually see visual memories of where you turned away from, as you say, what is, or from the innocence of being open to life. Is that your experience? Do people actually visually connect or have specific, distinct memories?

**Steve:** You may have heard people talk about near death experiences, where your whole life flashes in front of you. For many people it’s like that, and it is like a movie going on of all those events. Deep memories are being brought up to the surface. It’s as real as real.

**Sean:** But that’s not necessarily the case for everyone. We’ll have, say, twelve people in a session and maybe two or three will go into deep visionary states. For most people this is happening on such a deep level that on a conscious level they are feeling very much as if they’re having a death process. All their resistance is coming to the surface. They’re physically uncomfortable.

In my experience what tends to happen is that people sometimes get a little bit fixated on the visions. And then they start thinking, “Oh, I’m not receiving the visions and everybody else probably is.” Then they start giving energy to thought forms that this process hasn’t actually worked for them. So the way we introduce it is that part of the thing with it being a death state is that everything that comes to the surface is approached as a thought form. If for example there’s physical discomfort, ah, there is sickness, there is nausea. So drop back into the breath and allow the experience to be as it is. Then through that allowing, the plant is able to go in and pull that root up from even deeper.

It's a little bit different from ayahuasca in that when we're working a process with ayahuasca and someone comes with a focused intent and their intention is to open a pathway to spirit, and the ayahuasca is then going down that pathway and bringing that intent up to the surface. Then the person can experience the thoughts that are attached to that intent. And then they may feel the emotions attached to it, and then they may feel it on the physical side as the plant pulls the root to the surface. Then after a while the root comes out, and, whoosh, it's out.

But that's not naturally the case with the wood. It doesn't deal with the issues quite like that. You can have a really deep purge on the first night, but quite often people will eat wood all night and the wood may be stepping into them and going, "uh-oh, you sure need grounding man." So maybe they don't have a purge and they don't have that experience of the root coming out.

But that's not to say that they're not accessing a deep process. That's not to say the wood isn't working. It's still working but sometimes they need to cook for longer.

**Steve:** And when you work with us it's a thirty-three day ceremony. We have three days when we're all day, but then for the following thirty days, again, it's no drugs, no alcohol, just really being in recognition of the experience they're having each day. It continues to work. It continues to unfold and things fall away. After the thirty days is when you really know, "This has really grounded me."

Speaking from experience, I did my first ceremony with iboga in late spring, and it was the best summer of my life. I had never felt so grounded. So it's far more than just the three days. When people come to work with us they're coming with a serious intention to change things.

**Stephen:** During that first night, when people are having difficulty, when resistance comes up and that sort of thing, to what extent do you guys get involved and work with them?

**Steve:** We have to do very little. The iboga does most of the work.

Stephen: For example, again, in some ayahuasca ceremonies, I've been told by ayahuasqueros that when they're tuning into the individuals in the room and they see that someone is struggling, then they have certain kinds of songs that they bring through that help the person through that difficulty. But you're not so actively interventionist?

**Steve:** We don't need to because the space we're holding is a space in which they can do their own work. We're not holding the belief that we have to help them. And so we don't have to. It's a light filled space. It's a totally light filled space. People are adults and they're able to do their own work.

If we were working with people with serious drug addictions, like the clinics, there often is a need for intervention. But we very rarely have to intervene. When we work with ayahuasca, much more often is there a need to step in and do something. But it's a different medicine. When you take your dose of ayahuasca, four or five hours later it's wearing off or it's worn off. You take the iboga and you're on a long, long journey. It's a more focused and powerful experience in some ways.

**Sean:** The people who come to work with us are already taking responsibility for themselves. If they aren't already taking responsibility for themselves we'll work with them with ayahuasca first.

**Steve:** Or we'll recommend some other kind of medicine or ceremonial work beforehand. We're quite happy to say to somebody, "Well, you need to go and do this first."

**Stephen:** I'm getting the sense that you see ayahuasca as a step toward iboga. Is that so?

**Steve:** Well, they're two very different medicines. Ayahuasca is much more forgiving. It's a much more flowing,



feminine experience, whereas the iboga is very focused, very male energy. This means that if it's necessary for somebody to do some work before they come and experience the iboga, then often the ayahuasca is a good thing to send them to. But sometimes we may suggest to someone that he go on a ten-day retreat, for example. It's horses for courses if you know that expression, although in this situation I think we're saying it's the right course for the particular horse.

**Stephen:** So you two sit through the night and the day with them?

**Steve:** We do, yeah.

**Stephen:** And you take a small amount of the iboga?

**Steve:** Just a little bit to connect.

**Sean:** To jump back to the ayahuasca: the wood is such a big journey, and it's about taking responsibility, and not everybody is ready to take responsibility. That's why we work with stillness. When we're working in quiet, with the nothingness, there's no compromise, because we're having to let go of everything. But not everybody is ready to let go into the stillness. In a way it's easier to do that with ayahuasca. The ayahuasca is a dance, it's facilitating spiritual awakening, and when we're working in stillness with it, we find that people are coming looking for themselves. And through the ayahuasca they find that everything they've been searching for is already within them and has always been present.

So the journey with ayahuasca is very much the experience of transcending their suffering in their death states. They're coming into trust and it's a trust that comes from knowing that everything is perfect. There's nothing to heal, there's nothing to change. They can just let go and trust.

When they come from this experience, stepping into the wood is a natural next step because now they're coming to the conscious practice of transcending their suffering whilst they're in the death state. So while ayahuasca is teaching us how to die, iboga is teaching us how to live.

**Steve:** That's an expression that's been around for a long time, that ayahuasca teaches you how to die and iboga teaches you how to live. With iboga it's absolutely necessary to be able to let go, so the ayahuasca is good training.

**Stephen:** That's why I keep coming back to the question of how people can actually move through the resistance. And it sounds like part of the answer is that you try to steer people away from it if you get a sense they're not ready for it.

**Steve:** Yeah, absolutely, And what you're letting yourself in for then as people who are running a practice, running ceremonies, is that if we mixed up people who are very grounded, who have come with a very clear intent to do with their spiritual purpose in life, if we lay them next to somebody who's trying to get off of cocaine, who's going through all kinds of torment, it's just not appropriate. So we let the people who are running clinics, who can spend several days detoxifying people, and then after the iboga, several days looking after them, integrating, we let them look after those people who are in real difficulty. So as you say, the people who come to work with us are well prepared.

**Stephen:** Before I move onto some other questions I have in mind, is there anything about the way that you work with iboga that we haven't covered that you would like to have communicated? Just in general, like what's important for people to know if they're considering looking into this.

**Sean:** We call it an iboga awakening. What we usually do with people who come to do the sessions is we get them reading Eckhart Tolle's work. We usually have them read A New Earth before they come. With iboga you really

come to terms with what the pain body is and Tolle uses a very easy language for enlightenment. Then when people come to do the session we can use that kind of language with them.

They're coming to do a practice of presence and we introduce the whole weekend as a practice. We're doing this practice together and just letting go of everything. We just eat the wood and allow it to do its work.

**Steve:** And the other key thing to say is that people are working through the ceremony, and at some point during the ceremony or at some point afterward they reach this natural state, which is a state of stillness. Almost without fail that's what happens, that's where people land.

**Stephen:** Do you do any follow-up with people? Are you aware, for example, of how that state holds up for people in a year or two?

**Steve:** I would say it does. We're in touch with a lot of people and usually we have people coming who came through those who've already done the ceremony.

**Sean:** The thing with introducing people to Eckhart behorehand is that most of them are quite familiar with the practices. On the first night I come around and check on everybody, and if anyone is having any difficulty, getting distracted by their story or whatever, we just provide a moment, almost like a satsang, a little chat or reflection in case they've forgotten their intention. And we just bring them back into the prayer again.

**Stephen:** So then is there a change as it gets into the next day? They're just lying down still, right?

**Sean:** Yeah, there's an intensity on the first night. It's very noticeably the death. And we carry on eating til about dawn. Then in the morning there tends to be more of a density of experience. They're much deeper in the death state, they're in the bardo state, and it's the land of the hungry ghosts. None of their thoughts are able to find satisfaction. They're not comfortable.

It's the valley of death, the first part of the morning.

Then as we start to transition through the day, we start to move into the stillness, and the iboga is grounding us into that space between thought and bringing that experience up to the surface. As we move through the day there's a transition, from a death state with a lot of mind going on, to a really deep experience of stillness that comes in the afternoon. Sometimes people will still be deep in the death state but usually most of the group, as it comes into the afternoon, will have begun to transition into this deep place of stillness and then rebirth.

**Stephen:** We'll take a pause here to allow listeners to digest all this in somewhat bite-sized chunks, then we'll continue with the third and final segment.

### Part Three

**Stephen:** Welcome back. We were speaking about how the ceremony unfolds and Sean was more or less in the middle of describing more about that.

**Sean:** We were talking about the middle day, but just to mention that first night when I'm working with the wood. It's like having lots of different pots on the gas. The wood is very clear with each person on where they are with their journey, whether I need to be turning the gas up and giving them bigger doses, or turning it down and giving them smaller doses to enable them to have a longer cook before they come up to heat.

**Stephen:** Sean, early in our conversation you alluded to the fact that the spirit of the wood is working through you. You were speaking at that point about the consultation process. Am I correct in assuming that this is also

occurring during the ceremony, that the wood is feeding you information about the participants?

**Sean:** Yes, that's right. And we're kind of holding that space free of direction. We're in the practice of presence and we're in that space where we're not giving any energy to any thought whatsoever. So then everything that needs to come through comes through in the moment. We're holding the space and in holding that place of stillness we're leaving the space for spirit to step through and take care of whatever needs to be taken care of.

**Stephen:** Do you experience it that way as well Steve.

**Steve:** Yeah, for sure. It's good that you mentioned the connection to spirit beforehand because it seems to be quite common for people to strongly experience the presence of the iboga plant spirit before they come to the ceremony. It happened for me. It was about a week before the ceremony. I'm not someone who has a lot of visions or is a very visual person, but I suddenly found myself surrounded by Pygmies one afternoon. I just glanced and there were Pygmies all around me.

**Stephen:** You were not under the influence of any substance and this was daytime and your eyes were open?

**Steve:** Well it was after an ayahuasca ceremony, so I was more open to the other dimensions of activity than perhaps I would normally be. As with Sean's story about the black man walking in while they're chatting on the phone, these things are happening all the time.

**Sean:** And if for some reason this work isn't appropriate for someone, then something will happen in the weeks leading up to the session to make it blatantly clear that this is not appropriate for them. Or there'll be such a level of process come up for them that they'll see that they're just not ready. Then they'll get in touch with us and we'll have another conversation. We'll keep them on the mailing list, and then at a later stage when they feel they're ready, they'll get in touch with us again and we'll do another consultation.

**Stephen:** We were speaking earlier about how things move through that middle day. Could you talk more about that please?

**Sean:** We spoke a little about the death state in the morning. So we've had a density of being which has moved through the day. And even though we're not eating wood on the second day, it's unmistakably part of the journey. We're doing the whole weekend as a practice, and though people do have an opportunity to go outside and get a little air, for the most part they're just lying down and they're moving through this territory. They're moving from the density of the deep death state, moving through into the life state. And as they're moving into their life state they're experiencing what it is to be grounded. The gift of the wood is that it's grounding us into the space between thought. And the space between thought is more of an experience than a concept.

As we move through into the afternoon this experience starts to be shared. It's an amazing time to be sitting in stillness. Some people will still be quite deep in the death state and not sure what's going on while others will already be starting to feel that stillness in the afternoon. Usually by the time we move into the evening of the second day a shift has taken place. Everybody feels it. Now we're moving into the rebirth. Whereas on the first night that wood was channeling us into our death state, now that same wood is channeling us into dancing.

**Stephen:** Before the dancing there's a meal right? I imagine that would help ground people.

**Steve:** It does. It also has a symbolic purpose. It marks the stage where we're moving into the rebirth. This is a little bit of food, a little bit of energy for the journey back down the mountain.

**Stephen:** Do people have much of an appetite by then?

**Steve:** Not usually but sometimes they do. Sometimes people are still feeling very nauseous. But we get everybody to at least eat a little bit so that they're all woven in together for the next step. Because it really is like bringing people back down from the mountain and everybody has to come with us.

That's why we use the dance. After the meal there's a bit of time to relax, then everybody's up, I do some drumming, and we dance. That carries on for two to three hours minimum. We also use recordings of magonga [a kind of mouth bow] music from equatorial Africa.

**Sean:** We have some excellent music. We have one CD that starts off a bit slower—the thing in bwiti is that life is a journey—and so we start the journey off in small steps. And bwiti loves to dance. So we start in small steps. We've got this guy who's like the Jimi Hendrix of the bwiti world. [laughter].

**Steve:** And all this time I'm working with a frame drum and I can dance with it, so I'm moving around with everybody and Shaun is too. We're looking around and we only stop the dancing when we feel very comfortable that everybody is where they need to be. Once we're in that place people are absolutely ready to then just lie down and be in a very peaceful, still space through the night. Some people will sleep, some people won't sleep.

Then the next morning we ask everybody to take a shower, put fresh clothes on because they've lying there in those same clothes for two days. We have some breakfast, we come back together as a circle, we sit in meditation for a little while, and then we dance a bit more. That last dance session is important because that's when we get to look around the circle and just check where everybody is. Then we have a talking circle and people have the opportunity to speak about their experience. But usually not very much is said. Usually people have had such a profound experience that—occasionally there are people who want to reel off a lot of detail—but usually it's quite brief and to the point. Before we do the talking circle we encourage people not to talk about their experiences, ideally, for the thirty days after the ceremony. The reason for this is, how easy is it to fix a story. As soon as you've told that story you're not sitting in the experience, you're just reeling the story off from the last time. It's almost like you've closed the book. Whereas if you don't talk about it to others, if you just stay open, stay with the experience, then, bearing in mind that you've passed through so many different states of consciousness during this journey, you are allowing the time for those memories to come back to the surface.

So then bits of the jigsaw puzzle will be coming up into your consciousness, your everyday experience, as you are working your way through those thirty days after the ceremony. You talk to somebody thirty days later and they're going to give you such a different picture, a much fuller picture. We always say that the proof of the work is the everyday life after the ceremony. You don't ground everything there in the ceremony. You ground it by allowing the experience to stay present with you over the days and the weeks afterward.

**Sean:** You don't actually have much choice for the period afterward, for those thirty days, because you kind of have to be conscious. What happens is that you come out the other side and your DNA has been restructured according to your intent. So you come out, you have these thirty days, and this is where the work really starts, because now you've been grounded, you've been grounded into the earth and it's as if somebody's pulled the thought switch, and you've dropped into this place of stillness.

**Stephen:** Apart from not talking about the experience, what other advice do you send people away with for how to manage that period of time?

**Sean:** I tell them, "You're stepping into an awakened state of being, you've been grounded, you've done a death, accessed the line of your ancestors, and a rebirth. This ceremony grounds itself into your life. The first part that gets grounded is the death. What happens with the death is that all those aspects that came to the surface before your session, all those aspects where you were ungrounded, all those aspects where you get immediately sucked into an experience, all those aspects that you judge, they start to come up again afterwards. They come up in different voices, different expressions over that month, but it's that same experience that's come up before."

But now what's happened is that you're grounded. So this experience comes in and you're able to see it. There's a recognition, "Ah, of course." And now, because you're grounded, there isn't the same tendency to get drawn straight into it. Now there's a part of you that's able to witness it."

**Stephen:** That's essentially exactly the way I've been taught that basic mindfulness/awareness meditation works, that you begin to identify with the space surrounding those events that arise in your mind rather than just being those things and being lost in them, or, as we used to say, going solid on them.

**Sean:** Hmm, yeah. And it's quite interesting because there's a space now where you're not just witnessing the experience, you're allowing the experience to be as well.

**Steve:** It's like a big, open channel.

**Sean:** So now you're having an opportunity to come into acknowledgement, allowing that experience to come up to the surface. You're not trying to hit the remote control and change the channel. And by allowing the experience to come up and be seen as it is, then you start to see the roots. And of course the understanding comes from not wanting to understand. So now, instead of having an intellectual insight from the weekend, maybe on the first night, of what it was all about, you're having the opportunity of experiencing it as your living truth.

This is where it can start to get a little bit tricky for people. It's like having a Zen master living inside your head. If your story comes up into your head and your sitting there with your master and you get distracted by what's going on out the window in the dream, and you forget that it is a dream, then the Zen master comes along and bops you on the head with a stick. In that moment you go, "Ah, of course!" The iboga is doing that as well, but it's not using a stick to hit you on the head with, it's using your reality.

So, it brings the experience up to the surface and if you identify with it and project it out it's going to come back. You know, you project it out, you get drawn into it for a way, then you realize, "Ah, I've just been caught in my pattern again." Then you drop back into experience and a little while later, not a week down the line, but really soon, it's going to come back. But this time it's going to be twice as big and it's going to hit you in the face. And if you project it out again, three times as big.

**Stephen:** This is a common experience you've seen with people in that follow-up period after the ceremonies?

**Sean:** Yeah.

**Steve:** I wouldn't necessarily describe it in the same way but I understand what Sean means. It's like that. Once you've experienced a different state, then the old state comes back to try and reinstate itself, and then there's a clash, unless you're really awake and aware and you can just let it pass straight through.

**Sean:** What the wood's doing is bringing us to that place where we haven't been able to push through on our own. Now it's pushing us through and saying, "No, you're not looking. Pay attention. Look again." And if you're really in denial of it, after a while it starts to get ridiculous. Then you have to laugh, and when you laugh you realize you're laughing with this presence, this presence is laughing with you.

It's not so much an experience of letting go of your suffering, not like pulling the plug and down your suffering goes. Instead, it's more like letting go into your suffering.

**Stephen:** To broaden things out a little as we near the close, I'm wondering if either of you have anything to say about how iboga is part of the larger picture of global consciousness transformation, how it's spreading and developing etcetera.

**Steve:** Well, I don't think I have much to say about that to be honest. I mean, I could, but it's all just speculation. All I can say for sure is that we are being invited to more and more places to do this work. As far as there being a limit to the medicine, all resources on this planet have some kind of limitation on them but I really don't see it as an issue these days.

**Stephen:** Are you aware of very many people doing what you do?

**Steve:** Not that many, whereas if you're looking at ayahuasca, even just in this geographical area [Pacific Northwest in U.S. and Canada] I've been told that there are many groups. Not so many with iboga, but then you have to have had the opportunity to work with it in the first place. That hasn't been so easy. Even going to Africa, it's not straightforward. It can be a very difficult place to go. You don't know what you're going to find. This is based on direct feedback. I didn't go to Gabon. Sean went to Gabon and quite a few other people I know have been there. Some people came back really with the plant spirit, and other people came back, in a way with the plant spirit, but actually with more problems than they went away with. There's lots of sorcery, black magic, arrows flying about, just as there are in South America. Anyone will tell you that, that a lot of the shamans out in the wilder areas are really not holding their space at all. There's so much ego present, and it's the same in Africa. So you have to be really careful when you go and work with strong medicines in these environments.

Sean: I have to say that when we first started we used to have a lot more people who were into energizing their suffering. People who work with us now, for the most part, are into their awakened state. Last year the reflection came up that people were getting used to the fact that we're now living in a polar shift and that all their future concepts had now gone out the window. And there was a degree of anxiety and fear about what was now going to happen. But the experience we're having now that's coming up to the surface is more one of excitement, of the expectation of the potential of being an awakened being in this current time and place.

**Steve:** And for sure, if you've been called in, the plant is happy to work with you wherever you are. There's no issue between the different plants either. You can be in an ayahuasca ceremony and "Oh, here's the iboga plant spirit standing next to me." So we're seeing it as a very open, anything is possible world at this point in time.

**Sean:** And the other energy that comes up quite a lot is the Mexican Prince of Flowers. I think they call him Xochipilli. He had a prophecy way back that at some point in the future all the plants would start to merge. We really do experience that, a deep merging of all the medicine plants.

**Steve:** With all the religions and all the spiritual paths everybody is opening up to everybody else. We're happy to admit that we're not performing an African ceremony here, but we're working with an African plant. We're open about that. We're not trying to imitate anything here. We're working with what's come to us. It's like working with what works. If it works, work with it.

**Stephen:** My impression is that you've both come to this point where you are now in an organic way of following wise inner promptings and the guidance of the medicine. You seem to be doing it with integrity, care, and responsibility. It feels pretty good to me. I'd be happy to come to one of your ceremonies so I hope you come back.

**Steve:** We do instill a very deep feeling of trust amongst the people we work with.

**Stephen:** Thank you very much gentlemen and keep up the good work.

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